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SUBJECT: CODEL MCCAIN STRESSES NEED FOR POLITICAL PROGRESS
TO PM MALIKI

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a brief meeting with Prime Minister Maliki on Nov. 23, the members of Codel McCain applauded the recent security progress in Iraq but stressed the need for political progress to cement the security gains. In particular, Senator McCain pressed Maliki on the need to make progress on legislation addressing revenue sharing, provincial powers, and de-Ba'athification reform. "Will the de-Ba'athification law be passed by January 1, 2008?" the Senator asked Maliki repeatedly. Maliki danced around the question before ultimately -- and unconvincingly -- saying that the law would "certainly" be passed by that date. The members of Codel McCain tried to focus the Prime Minister by reminding him that the majority of the American people still favor withdrawal from Iraq. As Senator Graham put it: "The environment is as secure as it has ever been...The time (for real political progress) is now." End summary.

¶2. (C) The members of Codel McCain (Senators John McCain, R-AZ; Lindsey Graham, R-SC; John Barrasso, R-WY; Saxby Chambliss, R-GA; and Governor Jon Huntsman, R-UT) met briefly with Prime Minister Maliki on November 23 at his residence. Sen. McCain congratulated the Prime Minister (PM) on the security gains in Iraq, noting that notwithstanding the casualties taken by the Iraqi Security Forces, thousands of Iraqis are still stepping forward to join the police and protect their country. He urged the PM to move forward on legislation addressing de-Ba'athification reform, revenue sharing, and provincial elections. Speaking as "a friend of yours, and of the Iraqi people," Sen. McCain told Maliki that political progress would make a big difference in how the American public perceive Iraq.

¶3. (C) The other members of the Codel echoed Sen. McCain's point. For example, Sen. Chambliss cautioned Maliki that all of the Democratic presidential candidates favor a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and warned that American patience has worn thin. "Now is the time to move ahead on de-Ba'athification and provincial powers. We haven't given you timetables, but the time is now. I urge you to move forward with all due haste," said Sen. Chambliss. Sen. Grasso said that the people of Wyoming were looking to PM Maliki for "quick results."

¶4. (C) Maliki attempted to assure his interlocutors that any delays in achieving political reconciliation were due solely to the security situation; now that security had improved, his government was free to focus on advancing reconciliation and economic reconstruction. The Codel was politely skeptical. Sen. Graham asked Maliki: "When I'm asked whether there will be a breakthrough on the benchmarks by January 2008, what should I say?" Maliki responded with a somewhat incoherent explanation of Iraq's "social evolution," which included insights such as "citizens are now playing a positive role" and "Iraqi forces were primitive, but now the quality of their training has increased." Sen. Graham politely but firmly told Maliki that: "The environment is as

secure as it has ever been....The time (for real political progress) is now."

15. (C) Perhaps sensing that PM Maliki wasn't hearing the Codel clearly enough, Sen. McCain asked Maliki whether the de-Ba'athification bill would be passed by January 1, 2008. Maliki side-stepped, saying the law had been through its first reading this week (sic). Sen. McCain reiterated his question: "Will the de-Ba'athification law be passed by January 1, 2008?" Maliki finally, if somewhat unconvincingly, said that the law would "certainly" be passed by that date. Sen. McCain concluded the meeting by stressing that passage of the de-Ba'athification would be very important symbolically.

16. (U) Codel McCain did not have an opportunity to review this cable before departing Iraq.
CROCKER